

**State Board of Education
May 19, 2009
Item J**

Team: Commissioner's Office

Discussion Topic: Common Core Standards Memorandum of Agreement

Alignment with Goals:

Goal I: Support high-quality, innovative instruction to improve student achievement.

Background Information:

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Governors' Association (NGA) and several other education organizations have been working to establish the foundation for a voluntary, state-led common core standards initiative in math and English language arts in K-12 education. The intent of the effort is that states should join together to develop a set of voluntary standards that would increase academic rigor and relevance while preparing all students for success after high school in their chosen pathways. These standards would be internationally benchmarked, reflecting the global economy in which our students must compete. In June, draft national standards will be released.

The intent letter asks that commissioners sign on by May 15, 2009. Signing the MOA is an indication that a state will engage in the process; the MOA does not bind states to adopting the final product. Signing the MOA engages a state to review and comment on the development of the initial common core standards. If, at the conclusion of the process, a state determines it wishes to adopt the common core standards, CCSSO and NGA will assist in every way possible during the adoption phase.

Purpose of Discussion: To inform the board and to respond to any questions or concerns raised.

Cost Implications: N/A at this time.

Staff Available: Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner



Dear Governors and Chief State School Officers,

Since 1983 when *A Nation at Risk* was released, states have made tremendous strides in increasing the academic rigor of education provided to the nation's students. Yet despite 26 years of standards-based education, America's children still remain behind other nations in terms of academic achievement and preparedness to succeed in the global economy. The time has come for the nation's states to join together to collectively develop a set of standards that increase academic rigor and relevance; prepare all students for postsecondary education and workforce training; and are internationally benchmarked.

As you are aware, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) have been working together and with partners to galvanize support, build the relationships, and create the conditions necessary to embark on a common core standards initiative that will be the beginning of positive change in American education.

Attached you will find a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which outlines the process and conditions by which the common core standards will be developed as well as the roles and responsibilities of states in this effort. This document is now ready for your consideration and potential signatures. For a state to be considered a full participant in this initiative, both the governor and chief state school officer must sign the agreement. Please sign and fax (202.408.8076) or send electronically with signatures to Dane Linn at NGA Center (dlinn@nga.org) or Scott Montgomery at CCSSO (scottm@ccsso.org) by Friday, May 8, 2009. Please also submit a point(s) of contact to include name, title, email, and phone number.

While we have been clear along the way that signing the MOA is an indication that a state will engage in the process, the MOA does not bind states to adopting the final product. Signing the MOA engages a state to review and comment on the development of the initial common core standards. If, at the conclusion of the process, a state determines it wishes to adopt the common core standards, CCSSO and NGA will assist in every way possible during the adoption phase.

We are eager to begin this initiative and look forward to the challenging work ahead to complete the common core standards by the end of the year. We thank you for your leadership and desire to embark on this journey with us. With your support we believe we can transform the educational process for our nation's children and give them the knowledge and skills they and our country need to remain strong in the global knowledge economy.

If you have any questions concerning the MOA, please contact Dane Linn, director, NGA Center (dlinn@nga.org or 202-624-3629) or Scott Montgomery, deputy executive director, CCSSO (scottm@ccsso.org or 202-326-8688).

Sincerely,

Ray Scheppach
Executive Director, NGA

Gene Wilhoit
Executive Director, CCSSO

**The Council of Chief State School Officers and
The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices**

**Common Core Standards
Memorandum of Agreement**

Purpose. This document commits states to a state-led process that will draw on evidence and lead to development and adoption of a common core of state standards (common core) in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. These standards will be aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and be internationally benchmarked. The intent is that these standards will be aligned to state assessment and classroom practice. The second phase of this initiative will be the development of common assessments aligned to the core standards developed through this process.

Background. Our state education leaders are committed to ensuring all students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and success in the global economy and society. State standards provide a key foundation to drive this reform. Today, however, state standards differ significantly in terms of the incremental content and skills expected of students.

Over the last several years, many individual states have made great strides in developing high-quality standards and assessments. These efforts provide a strong foundation for further action. For example, a majority of states (35) have joined the American Diploma Project (ADP) and have worked individually to align their state standards with college and work expectations. Of the 15 states that have completed this work, studies show significant similarities in core standards across the states. States also have made progress through initiatives to upgrade standards and assessments, for example, the New England Common Assessment Program.

Benefits to States. The time is right for a state-led, nation-wide effort to establish a common core of standards that raises the bar for all students. This initiative presents a significant opportunity to accelerate and drive education reform toward the goal of ensuring that all children graduate from high school ready for college, work, and competing in the global economy and society. With the adoption of this common core, participating states will be able to:

- Articulate to parents, teachers, and the general public expectations for students;
- Align textbooks, digital media, and curricula to the internationally benchmarked standards;
- Ensure professional development to educators is based on identified need and best practices;
- Develop and implement an assessment system to measure student performance against the common core; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the common core standards and “end-of-high-school” expectations.

An important tenet of this work will be to increase the rigor and relevance of state standards across all participating states; therefore, no state will see a decrease in the level of student expectations that exist in their current state standards.

Process and Structure

- **Common Core State-Based Leadership.** The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) shall assume responsibility for coordinating the process that will lead to state adoption of a common core set of standards. These organizations represent governors and state commissioners of education who are charged with defining K-12 expectations at the state level. As such, these organizations will facilitate a state-led process to develop a set of common core standards in English language arts and math that are:

- Fewer, clearer, and higher, to best drive effective policy and practice;
 - Aligned with college and work expectations, so that all students are prepared for success upon graduating from high school;
 - Inclusive of rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills, so that all students are prepared for the 21st century;
 - Internationally benchmarked, so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society; and
 - Research and evidence-based.
- **National Validation Committee.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will create an expert validation group that will serve a several purposes, including validating end-of-course expectations, providing leadership for the development of K-12 standards, and certifying state adoption of the common core. The group will be comprised of national and international experts on standards. Participating states will have the opportunity to nominate individuals to the group. The national validation committee shall provide an independent review of the common core. The national validation committee will review the common core as it is developed and offer comments, suggestions, and validation of the process and products developed by the standards development group. The group will use evidence as the driving factor in validating the common core.
 - **Develop End-of-High-School Expectations.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will convene Achieve, ACT and the College Board in an open, inclusive, and efficient process to develop a set of end-of-high-school expectations in English language arts and mathematics based on evidence. We will ask all participating states to review and provide input on these expectations. This work will be completed by July 2009.
 - **Develop K-12 Standards in English Language Arts and Math.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will convene Achieve, ACT, and the College Board in an open, inclusive, and efficient process to develop K-12 standards that are grounded in empirical research and draw on best practices in standards development. We will ask participating states to provide input into the drafting of the common core and work as partners in the common core standards development process. This work will be completed by December 2009.
 - **Adoption.** The goal of this effort is to develop a true common core of state standards that are internationally benchmarked. Each state adopting the common core either directly or by fully aligning its state standards may do so in accordance with current state timelines for standards adoption not to exceed three (3) years.

This effort is voluntary for states, and it is fully intended that states adopting the common core may choose to include additional state standards beyond the common core. States that choose to align their standards to the common core standards agree to ensure that the common core represents at least 85 percent of the state's standards in English language arts and mathematics.

Further, the goal is to establish an ongoing development process that can support continuous improvement of this first version of the common core based on research and evidence-based learning and can support the development of assessments that are aligned to the common core across the states, for accountability and other appropriate purposes.

- **National Policy Forum.** CCSSO and the NGA Center will convene a National Policy Forum (Forum) comprised of signatory national organizations (e.g., the Alliance for Excellent Education, Business Roundtable, National School Boards Association, Council of Great City Schools, Hunt Institute, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association, and others) to share ideas, gather input, and inform the common core initiative. The

forum is intended as a place for refining our shared understanding of the scope and elements of a common core; sharing and coordinating the various forms of implementation of a common core; providing a means to develop common messaging between and among participating organizations; and building public will and support.

- **Federal Role.** The parties support a state-led effort and not a federal effort to develop a common core of state standards; there is, however, an appropriate federal role in supporting this state-led effort. In particular, the federal government can provide key financial support for this effort in developing a common core of state standards and in moving toward common assessments, such as through the Race to the Top Fund authorized in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Further, the federal government can incentivize this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to effectively implement the standards. Additionally, the federal government can provide additional long-term financial support for the development of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, other related common core standards supports, and a research agenda that can help continually improve the common core over time. Finally, the federal government can revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from states' international benchmarking efforts and from federal research.

Agreement. The undersigned state leaders agree to the process and structure as described above and attest accordingly by our signature(s) below.

Signatures	
Governor:	
Chief State School Officer:	

CCSSO / NGA Common Core Standards
TALKING POINTS FOR STATE COMMISSIONERS

These messages are similar to the messages developed for the Governors. Repetition of these messages will help explain this initiative, and its importance, to our key audiences.

COMMON CORE TALKING POINTS

- Today we live in a world without borders. To maintain America's competitive edge, we need all of our students to be well prepared and ready to compete with not only their American peers, but with students from around the world.
- Developing a common core of standards that are internationally benchmarked, aligned with work and post-secondary education expectations, and inclusive of the higher order skills they need is critical to this process.
- Working through the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, governors and chiefs are joining together to develop a set of common core standards that are based on research and evidence, are aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are internationally benchmarked.
- These common standards will bring about real and meaningful transformation of our education system to benefit all students.

MOA TALKING POINTS

- Signing this Memorandum of Agreement commits states to a state-led process to develop a common core of standards in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12.
- This work will build directly on recent efforts of leading national organizations and states which have focused on developing college-and career-ready standards. The purpose of this effort is to raise the bar for all students and states and it will draw on educational experts, and research based evidence.
- States will have the opportunity to review the standards during and throughout the entire development process. The standards will also be reviewed by an independent validation group prior to being made available for states to adopt.
- To goal is to release the core of high school standards late this summer, and then, in the fall, develop K-12 grade-by-grade standards.